

OT LESSON #31
“HAPPY IS THE MAN THAT FINDETH WISDOM”
by Ted L. Gibbons

AUTHOR’S NOTE: I feel a need to say once again that it is not my intent to show you a better or even a different way to teach these lessons. The manual is the product of inspiration, correlation, and prophets. The lessons as prepared and presented there are the expression of the Church with regard to teaching these materials. I have a quiet but continuous fear that these lessons I am writing will pull some of you away from the place you ought to be.

Please spare me that condemnation. If these musings show you undiscovered insights in the scripture blocks covered in each lesson, I will be delighted. If they assist you in understanding the doctrine and the word, I will be content. If they cause you who are teaching to set aside correlated materials to teach something else, I will be devastated. TLG

INTRODUCTION: This is what the Bible Dictionary says about Proverbs:

The Heb. word rendered proverb is *mashal*, a similitude or parable, but the book contains many maxims and sayings not properly so called, and also connected poems of considerable length. There is much in it that does not rise above the plane of worldly wisdom, but throughout it is taken for granted that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (1:7; 9:10). The least spiritual of the Proverbs are valuable as reminding us that the voice of Divine Inspiration does not disdain to utter homely truths. The first section, chs. 1--9, is the most poetic and contains an exposition of true wisdom. Chs. 10--24 contain a collection of proverbs and sentences about the right and wrong ways of living. Chs. 25--29 contain the proverbs of Solomon that the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah, copied out. Chs. 30 and 31 contain the "burden" of Agur and Lemuel, the latter including a picture of the ideal wife, arranged in acrostic form. The book is frequently quoted in the N.T., the use of ch. 3 being specially noteworthy.

The Proverbs are wonderful! They are rather like scriptural bumper stickers. I have often invited classes to rewrite them in more modern English on horizontal half sheets of cardstock and have then covered the walls of my classroom with them. Unlike some parts of the Old Testament, these gems are almost always clear and therefore penetrating. And almost all of them bridge the gap between ancient and modern Israel.

For example, how would you re-write these?

As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman which is without discretion (Prov. 11:22).

The hand of the diligent shall bear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute (Prov. 12:24).

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life (Prov. 4:23).

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise (Prov. 6:6).

Ecclesiastes is also a treasure house of wisdom, but it must be understood in the context of the information given in the Bible Dictionary:

A Greek translation of the Hebrew Koheleth, a word meaning "one who convenes an assembly," sometimes rendered Preacher. The book of Ecclesiastes consists of reflections on some of the deepest problems of life, as they present themselves to the thoughtful observer. The epilogue (Eccl. 12:9-14) sets forth the main conclusions at which the writer has arrived. The author describes himself as "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1).

The book of Ecclesiastes seems permeated with a pessimistic flavor, but must be read in the light of one of its key phrases: "under the sun" (1:9), meaning "from a worldly point of view." The term vanity also needs clarification, since as used in Ecclesiastes it means transitory, or fleeting. Thus the Preacher laments that as things appear from the point of view of the world, everything is temporary and soon gone--nothing is permanent. It is in this light also that the reader must understand 9:5 and 9:10, which declare that the dead "know not any thing," and there is

no knowledge "in the grave." These should not be construed as theological pronouncements on the condition of the soul after death; rather, they are observations by the Preacher about how things appear to men on the earth "under the sun." The most spiritual part of the book appears in chapters 11 and 12, where it is concluded that the only activity of lasting and permanent value comes from obedience to God's commandments, since all things will be examined in the judgment that God will render on man.

It would be worth your while to take a careful look at Lesson 31 in the Gospel Doctrine manual for the Old Testament. The writers offer wonderful insights about many of the most important messages of these books. I would like to focus on a few other principles that are emphasized in these pages.

1. AVOIDING SIN AND SINNERS:

My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not (Prov. 1:10).

This warning is delivered so many times in the Old Testament in one form or another that it is easy to ignore. I am intrigued by the use of the word "entice" in this verse. What does it suggest to you? How do sinners entice others to sin? How are we enticed by the media? By Advertizing? How is enticing different from encouraging or inviting or persuading? I think that enticing is an appeal to the natural man within us all. James said,

But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.(James 1:14).

Of course, behind the enticements to evil, if we look carefully, we will see the bitter countenance of Satan.

Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually (Moro. 7:12).

We can also be enticed by righteousness.

But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God (Moro. 7:13).

For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord, and becometh as a child, submissive, meek, humble, patient, full of love, willing to submit to all things which the Lord seeth fit to inflict upon him, even as a child doth submit to his father (Mosiah 3:19).

Moroni tells us that we can judge clearly between the enticements of good and evil. The difference is clear enough that we “may know with a perfect knowledge, as the daylight is from the dark night” (Moro. 7:15).

It is to this truth that Solomon alludes when he says, “Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird” (Prov. 1:17).

Did you ever try to catch a wild bird with your hands? This is not an activity likely to offer much success. And while we may not be as wary as birds, Moroni has promised us that we can discern the difference between good and evil very clearly. We can, if we are willing, always see the net being spread. Lucifer will attempt to disguise his tempters and his temptations, of course, so we must be wary and watchful.

Proverbs returns to this theme near the end of the book:

Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long (Prov. 23:17).

2. IMMORALITY

As you make your way through Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, you will find a powerful collection of warnings about this matter. For the writer of these

books, immorality is almost always described in feminine terms, but if you will, when you see the word “woman” or “strange woman”, think “immorality”, the messages of these passages will be quite clear.

And I find more bitter than death the woman, whose heart is snares and nets, and her hands as bands: whoso pleaseth God shall escape from her; but the sinner shall be taken by her (Eccl. 7:26).

Two of the most powerful passages about immorality in the standard works are in the book of Proverbs. The first is in Proverbs 7. Watch for the “enticing” as you read this chapter.

My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.

Keep my commandments, and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.

Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman:

That they may keep thee from the strange woman, from the stranger which flattereth with her words.

For at the window of my house I looked through my casement,

And beheld among the simple ones, I discerned among the youths, a young man void of understanding,

“Void of understanding” Those who understand what is at stake will avoid immorality as they would avoid poisonous serpents and runaway trucks.

Passing through the street near her corner; and he went the way to her house,

In the twilight, in the evening, in the black and dark night:

“In the twilight, in the evening . . .” How much of immorality takes place in the hours between sunset and sunrise?

And, behold, there met him a woman with the attire of an harlot, and subtil of heart.

“the attire of an harlot” How important is modesty of mind and dress? In 1913 Joseph F. Smith warned about

the present day fashions [which] are abominable, suggestive of evil, calculated to arouse base passion and lust, and to engender lasciviousness, in the hearts of those who follow the fashions, and of those who tolerate them (Conference Report, October 1913, p.8).

What were people wearing in 1913 to cause that kind of concern?

(She is loud and stubborn; her feet abide not in her house:

Now is she without, now in the streets, and lieth in wait at every corner.)

“lieth in wait at every corner” How many times a day do you encounter immoral words, images, situations? Elder Ezra Taft Benson said

Recently, a young man commented that if he quit reading books, watching television, seeing movies, reading newspapers and magazines, and going to school, there was a chance he might live a clean life. This explains, in large part, the extent to which the insidious evil of sexual promiscuity has spread . . . (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, p.409-410).

We must be vigilant and careful as we protect our lives and thoughts from this plague.

So she caught him, and kissed him, and with an impudent face said unto him,

I have peace offerings with me; this day have I payed my vows.

Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face,
and I have found thee.

I have decked my bed with coverings of tapestry, with carved
works, with fine linen of Egypt.

I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.

“I have decked my bed”; “I have perfumed my bed” The images of
immorality are almost always made to appear appealing and beautiful.

Come, let us take our fill of love until the morning: let us solace
ourselves with loves.

“let us solace ourselves with loves” The acts of immorality are so often
referred to as love. Whatever else might be happening to the young man in
this passage of scripture, it is not love!

For the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey:

He hath taken a bag of money with him, and will come home at
the day appointed.

“the goodman is not at home, he is gone a long journey” The “goodman” is
is the husband in this story. The message here is that no one will ever
know.

With her much fair speech she caused him to yield, with the
flattering of her lips she forced him.

He goeth after her straightway, as an ox goeth to the slaughter,
or as a fool to the correction of the stocks;

“as an ox goeth to the slaughter” How I pray and long for the members, and
particularly the youth, of this church to see clearly what is at stake in this
business of immorality.

Till a dart strike through his liver; as a bird hasteth to the snare,
and knoweth not that it is for his life.

“knoweth not that it is for his life” We know. It is all about spiritual life and death

Hearken unto me now therefore, O ye children, and attend to the words of my mouth.

Let not thine heart decline to her ways, go not astray in her paths.

For she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her.

“she hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her” Jacob mentions, for example, David and Solomon (Jacob 2:24) who were certainly strong men slain in part by immorality.”

Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death (vss. 1-27).

“Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death” Satan’s message that her house is the way to pleasure and fulfillment, that its chambers are chambers of freedom and love and self-expression, is among the most pernicious of Satanic lies in 6000 years of lies and deceit.

The second of these passages is in Proverbs 9:

A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing.

The quality of simpleness applied to the young man in Proverbs 7 is here applied to the woman.

For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city,

“ in the high places of the city” I think it used to be more difficult to find

immoral images and opportunities than it is now. The glare at us and call out to us from the magazine stands in our grocery stores, and from the programs on our TV's and from the alluring screens of our computers.

We are coming apart at the seams. Anyone can see that. Just read any newspaper any day. Evil has unclothed herself and walks the streets in brazen, impudent defiance (Boyd K. Packer, "What Every Freshman Should Know," Ensign, Sept. 1973, 38).

To call passengers who go right on their ways:

"To call passengers" How many escape the call? I am not speaking of submission here. But everyone hears the call. It is an evil echo permeating the pathways and highways of the planet.

Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him,

"Whoso is simple, let him turn in" Some submit at once. They are not made for resistance and refusal.

Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.

"she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet . . ." Others must be cajoled or enticed. "The experience will be wonderful, exciting, pleasurable, all the more because it will be our little secret."

But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell (Prov. 9:13-18).

"her guests are in the depths of hell" Read the 38th Psalm (verses 1-12) and see where the knowledge of his sins has taken David.

3. HONOR THE SANCTUARY

I was flying from California to Utah one Sunday, hoping to make it in time to fulfill a high council speaking assignment. The topic was reverence. The plane was delayed and for a while I thought I would be too late to give my message. Actually, I entered the chapel as the opening song began. But

while I was waiting and flying, I found myself captivated by a few verses in Ecclesiastes 5.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words (Eccl. 5:1-3)

I think this passage is an appeal for reverence in the house of God. I have applied that message to chapels and temples. The first footnote in the chapter leads to the Topical Guide heading, *Reverence*.

What are the activities that are mentioned in these verses that sabotage reverence?

“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God” Don’t move around once you have arrived. Sit down and prepare for worship and edification.

“Be not rash with thy mouth” This warning comes in other ways in this passage. “Let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing.” “a fool's voice is known by multitude of words” We ought to be quiet. The phrase “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10; d&c 101:16) might be more of an invitation than a commandment. “Don’t move. Don’t speak. Listen and meditate and you will fill my presence and my power. You will know who I am.

“For a dream cometh through the multitude of business” We ought not to be conducting business during the meetings or while in the chapel waiting for meetings. I am not certain what the meaning of the word “dream” is in this phrase, but I suspect that it has something to do with being unaware of one's actual surroundings.

CONCLUSION: The book of Ecclesiastes ends with this injunction:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and

keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man
(12:13).

This is the underlying message of all scripture, including the two books we have studied in this lesson.

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